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April 18, 2006

Michigan House Agriculture Committee:

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to comment on the technical issues related to this prospective legislation.

My key points are as follows:

• Technically: genetic modifications of crop plants are not new. New gene-splicing techniques are, however, more precise and predictable than conventional breeding procedures. Dramatic increases in the productivity of rice, wheat, corn, and soybean are the result of breeding programs that have employed advanced techniques in plant breeding.

• Regulation: the regulatory system in the US evaluating and assessing safety of biotechnological crops (GMOs) is complex, but it works. It is becoming the accepted standard for the rest of the world. As a consequence, US developed GMOs are now being utilized and imported by other countries. The European Commission recently authorized imports of GMO maize for use in feed and food. GMO soybean meal has long been imported by the European Community.

• Safety: the biotechnological developed crops (GMOs) currently on the market (now over 10 years) are safe, non-allergenic, and have not been harmful to the environment. There have been no scientifically documented instances of any adverse human health effects. And, there have been real beneficial environmental effects due to reductions in pesticide use and tillage. Every national and international scientific agency that has evaluated these technologies (e.g., the US National Academy of Science, the National Research Council, FAO, WHO, the French and Italian Academies of Science) has concluded that GMOs are as safe as crops produced by conventional means.

• Pollen contamination: there are established isolation distances for crops to maintain varietal purity. Why? Because pollen flow can be predicted. The seed industry routinely employs these standards. And, in self-pollinated crops, e.g., soybean, this is a non-issue. Further, there is nothing in the USDA Organic Standards that states that incidental contamination by pollen from GMO or non-GMO crops jeopardizes an organic farmer's status.

• U.S. farmers should have access to the best tools and technology, and particularly if they want to stay competitive and profitable in a global economy. Such access should be considered critically important to Michigan's farmers.

DEPARTMENT OF
**HORTICULTURE**
Michigan State University
Plant & Soil
Sciences Building
East Lansing, MI
48824-1325
Main Off: 517/355-5191
FAX: 517/353-0890

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Sincerely,

Wayne Loescher, PhD
Professor, Program in Plant Breeding and Genetics
Horticulture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
517-355-5191 ext 1380
loescher@msu.edu